

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PARIS 21036

GENEVA FOR AMBASSADOR YOUNG

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, FR
SUBJECT: BACKGROUND ON FRENCH DOMESTIC POLITICS FOR
AMBASSADOR YOUNG'S CONTACTS WITH THE FRENCH
GOVERNMENT

1. EIGHT MONTHS BEFORE THE MARCH 1978 LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS, THE FRENCH DOMESTIC SCENE IS EXPECTANT. UNTYPICALLY, THERE IS STILL NO SIGN OF THE SUMMER VACATION LULL IN EITHER PRESIDENT GISCARD'S "MAJORITY" COALITION, OR THE "UNION OF THE LEFT" OPPOSITION. ALTHOUGH THE FORMAL CAMPAIGNS IN FRANCE'S 490 ELECTORAL DISTRICTS WILL NOT GET ROLLING UNTIL THE VARIOUS PARTIES ANNOUNCE THEIR LOCAL PARLIAMENTARY CANDIDATES, POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS ARE ALREADY CLEARLY DOMINANT IN PARIS' FOREIGN POLICY DETERMINATION.

2. DISPUTES OVER WHO WOULD BE THE LEADER (PRIME MINISTER RAYMOND BARRE OR FORMER PRIME MINISTER JACQUES CHIRAC) OF THE MAJORITY, INTERSPERSED WITH THE PERSONAL RIVALRY THAT LED TO OPEN WAR FOR THE
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MAYORALTY OF PARIS, HAVE BESET THE MAJORITY SINCE LATE WINTER. IN AN EFFORT TO SETTLE THEIR PROBLEMS BEFORE CONFRONTING THE COMMON ENEMY OF THE OPPOSITION IN THE MARCH 1978 LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS, THE MAJOR PARTIES THAT COMPRISE THE RULING COALITION- VIZ, THE GAULLISTS, THE REPUBLICANS AND THE CENTER DEMOCRATS-ARE NOW MEETING. THEY HOPE TO WORK OUT

ELECTION STRATEGY AND COME UP WITH SOME KIND OF PROGRAM TO OFFSET THE LEFT'S COMMON PROGRAM. BUT THE GAULLISTS, AS THE MOST POWERFUL FACTION IN THE MAJORITY, ARE RETICENT ABOUT ANY KIND OF ELECTION PLATFORM; AND ONE OF THE SMALLER MAJORITY FACTIONS IS BOYCOTTING THE "SUMMIT". DESPITE THE ABOVE, IT SEEMS LIKELY THAT SOME KIND OF MODUS VIVENDI WILL BE REACHED BETWEEN NOW AND SEPTEMBER.

3. THE LEFT: JUST AS THE MAJORITY PARTIES ARE PLAGUED BY POLITICAL INFIGHTING, THE UNITED LEFT COALITION- SOCIALISTS (PS), COMMUNISTS (PCF), AND LEFT RADICALS (MRG) - CONTINUES TO DEMONSTRATE ITS OWN INTERNAL DIFFICULTIES AS WELL. BOUND TOGETHER SINCE 1972 IN AN UNEASY BUT CONTINUING ELECTORAL ALLIANCE, EACH OF THE MAJOR PARTNERS OF THE LEFT UNION (PS AND PCF) STRIVES TO PROTECT ITS OWN SHARE OF THE LEFT ELECTORATE FROM THE OTHER; SIMULTANEOUSLY THEY BOTH TRY TO PRESENT A MORE MODERATE AND UNIFIED FRONT WHICH WILL ATTRACT VOTERS FROM THE CENTER. THE INTERNAL LEFT DEBATE NOW FOCUSSES ON UPDATING THE "COMMON PROGRAM", THE UNITED LEFT'S PLATFORM FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1972. ALTHOUGH NEARLY CERTAIN TO BE SUCCESSFULLY RENEGOTIATED BY FALL, THE COMMON PROGRAM IS TODAY THE CENTER OF CONTENTION, PROVIDING EACH SIDE WITH OPPORTUNITIES TO STAKE OUT ITS OWN UNIQUE

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POSITION BEFORE ONCE AGAIN JOINING TOGETHER FOR THE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN.

4. PRESIDENT GISCARD D'ESTAING'S POSITION IN ALL THIS IS UNENVIABLE. JACQUES CHIRAC, HIS FORMER PRIME MINISTER AND THE MAN WHO SHOULD BE HIS MOST POWERFUL ALLY, HAS HIS HEART SET ON THE ELYSEE. HE THEREBY CONSTITUTES ALMOST AS MUCH A FOE OF GISCARD AS OPPOSITION LEADER FRANCOIS MITTERRAND. A SLOW ECONOMY, HIGH UNEMPLOYMENT, INFLATION, AND THE UNDEPENDABILITY OF GISCARD'S POLITICAL "NOSE" ARE NOT HELPING MATTERS. IF PRIME MINISTER BARRE REDRESSES THE ECONOMY BY THIS COMING WINTER, THE MAJORITY'S CHANCES FOR WINNING IN 1978 COULD BE SOMEWHAT IMPROVED; BUT RIGHT NOW PUBLIC OPINION POLLS ARE GIVING THE LEFT AROUND 53 PERCENT OF THE POPULAR VOTE. MANY BELIEVE GISCARD WOULD LIKE TO TRANSCEND CLASSICAL FIFTH REPUBLIC BARRIERS AND RULE WITH THE CENTER AND THE MODERATE SOCIALISTS-- BUT FOR THE PRESENT THIS EVENTUALITY APPEARS UNREALISTIC.

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